

Tropical Fevers: “Madness” and Colonialism in Pacific Literature

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Much attention has been paid to the psychological disorders of the colonized world. As Stephen Clingman has noted, “It turns out that the darkness at the heart of the colonial experience may be a certain history of madness” (1991, 231). That history involves the literary realm, which, critics have argued, provides an honest opportunity to evaluate the socio-political crises that attend western imperialism in its multiple forms. For example, literary works from Africa—Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing* (1973 [1950]), Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God* (1964), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat* (1986 [1967]), and Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* (1973)—are featured in Sue Greene’s analysis of panracial madness, which she has defined as a “convenient and effective metaphor for portraying normal reaction to the colonial experience” (1986, 20). While not cited by Greene, other works such as Wole Soyinka’s *Madmen and Specialists* (1971), Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Okey Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain* (2000) further portray how “psychological” disorders serve as mirrors of the chaotic and brutal consequence of occupation.

The Orient, too, has its share of the “insane.” Rudyard Kipling’s “The Madness of Private Ortheris” features a common British soldier, driven mad by what he has “bin an’ done” in India (1899, 748). For Ashis Nandy, this story is plagued by a cultural pathology of “pathetic self-hatred and ego constriction” and is part of a greater lexicon of “the political myths which a colonial power needs to sustain itself” (1983, 35, 37). In parallel fashion, the writings of “Orientals” reveal similar encounters with insanity.¹ In Rabindranath Tagore’s “Balai” (1965 [1928]), Sa‘adat Hasan Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh” (1989 [1948]), Najīb Maḥfūz’s *The Beggar*

(1986 [1965]), and Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt* (1996), the psychologically afflicted of both the Asian subcontinent and the Middle East speak of foreign conquest, the unquestioning acceptance of western cultural and political authority, the loss of native integrity, class and gender exploitation done in the name of "tradition," the alienation of the individual under such circumstances, or a combination of a number of these conditions.

Clearly, the literary and critical emphasis on Africa and the Orient has proven fruitful in analyzing the depictions of psychological ordeals that arise when the act of writing must face clashes of cultures and prerogatives; the insight provided by such theoretical explorations can be applied to the literature of the Pacific, which has been spoken of in terms of tropical malaises in the numerous texts produced by both expatriate and native-born writers. Like Africa and Asia, Oceania has experienced similar colonial conditions. Many nations—including Portugal, Spain, Holland, Russia, Great Britain, Germany, France, the United States, and Japan—competed for influence and primacy in the Pacific Islands, some of which have changed hands many times. As contact and negotiations of power among multiple interests ensued, so flourished tales of alienated and disturbed individuals, both "white" and "black." From the Spice Islands to the Galapagos, the creative imagination has been accompanied by traumatized and haunted souls, characters who are deemed victims of melancholy, delusions, self-destruction, and what is generally called "mad" behavior.

But unlike the critical study of either Africa or Asia, which has often depicted the colonial state as a simple binary between a "white" Europe and a "black" frontier, writing in the Pacific adds a new dimension to this phenomenon. Specifically, the Pacific has experienced multiracial colonialism, with the conflict between Japan and America displacing the powers of Europe. Intra-Pacific colonization (such as the yoking of the Cook Islands and Niue to New Zealand or Rotuma to Fiji), migration within the Islands, and Asian immigration have also complicated the sociopolitical situation (see Wesley-Smith 1994; Kiste 1994). Thus, identity is no longer (and perhaps never was) simply a problem of seeing one group in exact opposition to a racial "other." In this essay I bring Pacific Island literature into the ongoing discussion of literary madness to demonstrate the parallels between the history of the Pacific and that of other conquered territories. Though risky, I also tap established postcolonial theories in an attempt to unravel the meaning of degeneracy and deviancy as these concepts are employed as a tactic of racial (identity) politics. The ultimate pur-

pose of this analysis is to explicate how Pacific literature in particular can reveal a much more complex racial, ethnic, and gendered understanding of power.

THEORIZING “MADNESS” AS SOCIAL DISCIPLINE

Jonathan Sadowsky has noted that binary reasoning constitutes the basis for social identities within the colonial setting, which explains why the “decision to build asylums was made almost immediately after formal colonialism was established” (1999, 10). Colonialism, as bureaucratic as it is ideological, is legitimated and enforced through the rational identification of various elements in society and in the institutions that are created to recognize the differences among those elements. A prime example is seen in the actual medical history of the formerly independent Hawai‘i. At a time following the first unsuccessful annexation attempt, as the nation was increasingly falling under pressure from foreign elements, it is significant to note that race and gender are the only markers of distinction employed in F B Hutchinson’s report on the population of incarcerated psychiatric patients (1882, 82).²

Embedded within the extensive matrix of colonialism, power serves as the basis for our conventional views or definitions of madness. Both asylums and empires are constructed by pathologizing “dangerous” classes in society, wherein those in power master those who are not. The parallels between these resonate with Michel Foucault’s observation that defining the insane is undertaken by individuals, who in “an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbors, and communicate and recognize each other through the merciless language of non-madness” (1988, ix). Madness and colonial identities are both bound, often fused, within discursive productions of imperial states; therefore, any discussion of insanity within the colonial scenario must recognize the accompanying creation of social positions, which are also subject to differences of class, color, and heritage.

But demystifying and defrocking the convergence of insanity and identity politics requires a more sophisticated action than simply embracing madness as an alternative to or as an exoticized rebellion against the West. For this reason, Foucault’s caution against conventional approaches to madness is applicable to a study of literature in colonial territories:

To explore it we must renounce the conveniences of terminal truths, and never let ourselves be guided by what we may know of madness. . . . What is constitutive is the action that divides madness, and not the science elaborated once

this division is made and calm restored. What is originaive is the caesura³ that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason; reason's subjugation of non-reason, wrestling from it its truth as madness, crime, or disease, derives explicitly from this point. Hence we must speak of that initial dispute without assuming a victory, or the right to a victory; we must speak of those actions re-examined in history, leaving in abeyance all that may figure as a conclusion, as a refuge in truth. (1988, ix-x)

To profit from Foucault's advice, any critical analysis of madness must avoid calling reason the white man's burden and insanity the black man's curse if colonization's attempt to master racial subjectivity is to be unmasked and criticized. A constructive study must also refrain from linking "madness" to an inherent cultural or spiritual state of the indigene, less it fall under the spell of exoticizing difference. Rather, reading madness on a narrative level discloses colonialism's imperfect power to limit subjectivity to perfect racial binaries within Oceania—that chaotic but encompassing landscape described by poet Allen Curnow as the place where "History had many instinctive processes / Past reason's range, green innocence of nerves / Now all destroyed by self-analysis. / . . . / Flowing, became one flood, one swift corruption" (1945, 160). Because the "tropics were a constant source of anxiety over the potential for physical, mental, moral, and social degeneration" (Diaz 2002, 180), madness for writers of the Pacific can be read as symbolically challenging the limitations of rationality, bipolarity, hierarchy, authority, and the socially acceptable. In other words, fictional insanity licenses fluid avenues and more inclusive visions of self and history. Collectively, the body of Pacific writing brings us back to the caesura, to guide our attention to the corruption of order by multiple definitions of reality that continually compete with and occasionally displace the status quo.

EUROPEAN MADNESS AND AMERICAN ASCENDANCY: A LOOK AT JAMES NORMAN HALL

One of the first attempts to address colonialism in Oceania as a psychological complex was James Norman Hall's short story, "The Forgotten One," which was originally published in 1926.⁴ By 1952, the story appeared with a different ending that makes the "homosexual issue" more prominent (Burdick 1963). This revision is key to understanding the symbolic importance of the American narrator's fascination with the main

character, Crichton, the young Englishman who flees to a "God-forsaken little hole" of an island that he shares with an elderly Tahitian woman (Mama Ruau) and a Chinese servant.

The story begins with the narrator's romanticized recollection of his brief, two-day adventure with Crichton, an experience that haunts the narrator:

I have wandered far from Tanao since then, but the memory of it has followed me everywhere: through America, England, Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Iceland. . . . In Iceland, while watching the visible music of the northern lights, I have felt the softness of the air at Tanao and the smoke of the surf on my face from the combers rising to their height and thundering over the barrier reef. The island and its two lonely inhabitants have been more real to me, often, than the streets through which I passed or the people with whom I sat at table. (Hall 1926, 298–299)

For the narrator, Crichton's "deep joy at the prospect of uninterrupted solitude" seems a "little mad" (300). Yet, this madness is more substantial to the narrator than the mundane civilization he knows from his American perspective. The narrator realizes that Crichton is "one of those men who love solitude as other men love beauty; that to him it is really a manifestation of beauty in its most ravishing, pitiless form" (300). Reflecting on the expansive breadth of Crichton's library, which includes a volume of English Romantic poetry containing Shelley's "Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude," contributes to the narrator's further idealization of Crichton as a symbol of Europe's cultural and social primacy.

To a large extent, Crichton fits the profile of the European colonizer as described by O Mannoni, who argued that the colonial's fear of intrusion on his solitude is based on the attractive notion "that if the world is emptied of human beings as they really are, it can be filled with the creatures of our own imagination" (1990, 100–101). In many ways, the relationship between the narrator and Crichton exemplifies that "gentleman's code" that Europeans wanted to see in themselves—they being the "creatures" of a scripted fantasy (Edmond 1997, 154). However, the narrator's admiration for Crichton as "patriarch" is a mask for a greater desire, the concurrent American idealization of the British Empire, which W F Monypenny once hailed as "a nation State on a scale as the world has never yet beheld" (1905, 19). Just as America looked to Europe for cultural and historical precedence, so too does the narrator see Crichton as the beloved "parent" figure from whom the torch is received.

But romantic notions regarding Crichton's madness fade when the narrator returns to Tanao for his second visit. Despite having issued an invitation long ago, Crichton leaves his guest to his own resources. Soon afterward, the narrator is treated to a further shock:

Crichton himself emerged from the darkness of the veranda, walked down the steps, and groped among the bushes where the cock was roosting. He was lost to view for a moment, and when he reappeared I saw that he had the fowl under his arm. . . . "You shouldn't have made such an infernal racket," he said. "And just under my window, too! It isn't the first time either, and you know you've been warned. Now I am going to punish you—a quite serious little punishment. You won't like it in the least."

With that he took the fowl firmly by the legs, one in each hand, and very slowly and deliberately tore it apart. I could plainly hear the smothered rending of the flesh. (Hall 1926, 341–342)

Needless to say, the narrator hastily leaves the island and the tropical idyll ends. But the narrator's reaction leads us to speculate the change in his perception of Crichton. As Stephen Clingman has argued, "Labels of madness are notoriously imprecise, and may be stylized or misleading; they are easily prone to rhetorical manipulation for other purposes" (1991, 232). Clingman's observation suggests that the narrator's change of heart corresponds to the inevitable inversion of binary definitions that can occur when the "son" supplants the "father," when the "good" colonizer ascends over a "bad" one, when America supercedes its European counterpart.

Ironically, Crichton's savagery is essentially immaterial; what is revealed is a representation of Europe as an older, more brutal form of colonialism. This is made exceedingly clear in the revised 1952 version—the narrator comes back one last time to visit Crichton on his deathbed. It is at this moment that Crichton reveals himself as one of those "Mistakes of Nature . . . tragic, irremediable mistakes" (Hall 1952, 48). The death of Crichton three days later and his unceremonious burial represents the death of the European empire and its more obsolete, romantic notions of existence. What replaces it is the compassionate America, a country whose people need not suffer from existential debates, as they understand that such "moral outrage . . . is antique. Today such a person would solve his difficulty on an analytical couch or would disappear into the soft underworld of the almost respectable homosexual" (Burdick 1963, ix). Now the brief interlude between the narrator and Crichton signifies the moment when America had to "assume the obligations of a Pacific power," a moment in

which “our relations with Europe [were] of pressing—but only momentary—importance” (Michener 1949, viii). Yet, this entire negotiation of white colonial power occurs with scant attention to the Pacific Islanders or the Asian immigrants who inhabit the landscape where this contestation of power takes place. As such, Hall’s depiction offers a complex reworking of colonial desire—as an intra-Occidental construct, instead of a purely racial one involving the West and a foreign landscape.

ARIEL AND CALIBAN IN THE PACIFIC: A CLOSER LOOK AT ALBERT WENDT

Nevertheless, colonialism affects the lives of people like Crichton’s Mama Ruau, as natives, too, are involved in the racial politics that inevitably accompany colonial empires. For some, the accommodation of power emblematically justifies the presence of the West. Such is the case with the African who gives a French salute on the cover of a magazine and symbolizes how “France is a great empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors” (Barthes 2001, 116). But for others who do not choose the fate of Prospero’s servant pixie Ariel, their status is represented by Caliban, the angry, irreverent, and self-destructive Shakespearian demon who represents the other half of Mannoni’s vision of the colonized world. Both characterizations of native identity are addressed respectively in two of Albert Wendt’s short stories, “The Coming of the White Man” and “Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree.” These paired narratives, first published in 1974, explore the limitations colonial ideology imposes on native consciousness.

The first tale follows the homecoming of Peilua, the foreign-educated son of a pharmacist. His return to Sāmoa is hailed as “The Day of the Coming of the Whiteman,” because Peilua returns bearing a “massive and expensive suitcase” and is immediately transformed into a figure of worship (Wendt 1974a, 73). His family begins to call him “our relative, the papalagi [white foreigner]” (74). His uncle offers him the best sleeping mats, the newest mosquito net, and the bathroom for hour-long showers. The remaining members of the clan dedicate their time to serving all of Peilua’s needs, including cooking, cleaning, ironing, and providing him with spending money. His family’s devotion is matched in public by the village, and Peilua is left to do as he pleases, including abducting a vir-

ginal girl for marriage. However, Peilua's prestige ends when his suitcase suddenly disappears and everyone's attitude changes overnight. His wife leaves him. His uncle repossesses the mats, the mosquito nets, and the other half of the house. His family labels him a "good-for-nothing lay-about" (80). And when he cannot pay for his drinks at the local pub, he is severely beaten to the point of permanent brain damage. As the story concludes, Peilua has been reduced to the role of the village idiot; he is seen eagerly telling anyone who will listen, "I am white. A whiteman" (83).

Peilua's tragedy lies in his unquestioning acceptance of assimilation. Ironically, Peilua's attempts to do so are not the source of his madness; his malady stems from the community's violent infliction of corporal punishment as he fails to live up to external pressures to be "white." As the narrator suggests, the community crucified the man they had sent abroad with the hope that he might achieve what they could not—a better racial station in life. Peilua becomes symbolic of the self-annihilating hatred of a body that cannot flee its biological domain. His clothes, his perfect command of English, even his affair with a *papalagi* woman are all meant to do the impossible—to completely erase the birth color of the native. When such temporary trappings are lost, as material possessions easily are, nothing remains to shield poor Peilua from the anger of his people, who are bound to the insurmountable absurdity of their mandate.

The rejection of assimilation is a much desired postcolonial tactic; however, the outright "nativist" reaction to colonialism also has its pitfalls, as seen in the story "Flying-Fox in a Freedom Tree," within which the unresolved issue of racial identity leads a man named Tagata to succumb to what he sees as the inescapable colonial situation. As the friend of the narrator Pepesa, the "dwarf" Tagata is one of those unruly Samoans whose home is Apia's Vaipē neighborhood, otherwise known as "the dark world of sin and allthings [*sic*] that they [Christianized Samoans] believe is against religion and good living" (Wendt 1974b, 119). Their rebellion against colonialism includes quitting high school, rejecting the opportunities a western education entails, torching a church, and robbing Pepesa's father, a sellout who forsakes native ways and exploits his own people to become an elite among whites.

But although the slum seemingly offers sanctuary, and although both characters are empowered by their rebellious anti-West stance, Tagata succumbs to the insurmountable power of racial identity that keeps him locked within the Vaipē, the only place where a rebel can exist. Pepesa realizes Tagata is "escaping . . . and it is like a new madness" (137). Sui-

cide makes Tagata’s madness complete, and Tagata’s suicide note displays a moment of lucid, brutal self-analysis:

Because life is ridiculous, it has to end [in] the most ridiculous way, in suicide like Christ. Laugh, Pepesa, because I am right there inside the death-goddess which no one believes in anymore, and her sacred channel is all lava. Laugh, Pepesa, because her lava machine is grinding me, the Flying-Fox, to dust. Laugh, Pepesa, because there is nothing else to do.

The papalagi and his world has turned us, and people like your rich but unhappy father and all the modern Samoans, into cartoons of themselves, funny crying ridiculous shadows on the picture screen. Nevermind, we tried to be true to our selves. (141, italics in original)

Tagata’s malady produces this final epiphany: because colonization’s power transforms both the rebel and the assimilationist into empty shadows, both are equal caricatures in the absurd world of postcontact Sāmoa. For Wendt, this situation symbolizes the power of imperialism, the ability to limit the range of racial identity for the native, who suffers “because the white man has come, and if at a certain stage he has been led to ask himself whether he is indeed a man, it is because his reality as a man has been challenged” (Fanon 1967, 98). Tagata signifies racial identity’s metamorphosis into an existential crisis under the colonial construct that confronts the native with an unjust demand—to bring himself into permanent step with the white world. When “black” becomes inherently determined in relation to whiteness, there is no choice other than inferiority or dependency for the colonized, regardless of whether or not he resists. As implied by Wendt, madness becomes the consequence of this Manichean, binary state.⁵

Therefore, unlike Christ, who can be read as an earlier victim of colonization by the West (Rome), Tagata cannot ascend to liberation, even as a symbolic flying-fox (*pe’a*), the flight of which in Wendt’s rendition of Samoan myth heralds the King of Heaven’s defeat by his son, Pepesa. For Tagata, there is only the black and desolate image of lava and dust, an image that is mirrored in the pattern found in the rope’s branding of the skin around his neck. Thus a sad irony lies in this colonial subject’s emergence into spiritual resistance. “Tattooed” by colonialism, Tagata is heroized as if completing ritual body inscription, observed by Wendt as a time when one is supposed to “Faale lau pe’a” or “let your flying fox fly,” the sexual connotations of which signify the male mana (1999, 402). However, for the dwarf who never became a “man,” death cannot mean flight or empowerment, because the culturally and socially significant meaning

of his act dies with Pepesa. Death offers no redemption, because no satisfactory definition of native identity can be made through an absolute (mirror-reversal) stance against white oppression. Since such a move only reaffirms the fixed center of "whiteness," effacement appears to be the only method of remaining true to oneself. The story ends with Pepesa's own demise and his final words, "All is well in Lava, so spake the Flying-Fox" (Wendt 1974b, 144). As a complement to this nihilistic ending, the story of this flying fox is further developed in Wendt's 1979 novel, *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*, and is followed by the narrative of another character, Pepesa's illegitimate half-brother, whose unscrupulous though somewhat admirable determination to survive suggests that the vacuum of madness is the "calm" before the overwhelming onset of social and political change in Sāmoa's new, capitalistic wasteland.

To a large extent, Tagata's failure to enact change and to disrupt violent authority as the method of socialization is symbolic of Caliban's socio-political impotence. The native's dilemma is addressed in greater detail in another of Wendt's works, *Pouliuli* (1977), which tracks the antics of Faleasa Osovae, a "madman" who feigns insanity on waking up and realizing how "He despised everything he had been, had become, had achieved: his forty years as a deacon and lay preacher; his almost unlimited power in the matai [chiefly] council; his large profitable cacao plantation; his title as the highest-ranking matai in Malaelua; his nationally respected reputation as an orator; his detailed knowledge of genealogies and history, which was envied by other matai; his utter loyalty and devotion to his village and aiga [family] and church; his unquestioned reputation as a just, honourable, courageous, and humble man of unimpeachable integrity; and his perfect health" (1). Osovae's dilemma is based on the transformation of his countrymen and country into a vain and materialistic society. His illness allows him the clarity of vision by which he can identify the corruption of his wife's nephew (the local pastor), the shallow nature of a number of the elders, the greed prompting his cousin's service as parliamentary representative, and the spoilt and condescending attitudes of his wife and children. This "truth" leads to Osovae's quest for individual freedom through the destruction of "power without conscience, [which is a] symptom of the sickness in the nation's soul, a tragic mimicry, an absence of faith in things Samoan" (131). Unfortunately, Osovae's planned resistance is revealed as another form of power; an inner voice reminds him, "Your bid for freedom in these last years of your life is vanity too, you now tell yourself" (113). At this point, Osovae's dream of embracing Pouliuli (darkness) and of finding consequential meaning in that sacrificial act of

erasure disintegrates when his plans to install his younger son as his successor go awry and he succumbs to actual insanity and muteness. This Wendt novella clearly reveals how even the *desire* to act against the power structure can be warped by the very power it seeks to resist.⁶

MOVING BEYOND POLARITY: SUBRAMANI’S AND CAMPBELL’S MONGRELIZED STATES

Manichean immutability, or the seemingly fixed and oppositional nature of racial identities, is not limited to the native, but is meant to ensure the control of a much more diverse population. Subramani’s collection of short fiction, *The Fantasy Eaters* (1988), focuses on the insane men and women of Fiji, a former British colony, which has been transformed into thriving sugar plantations and luxurious resorts via the importation of Indian indentured labor and the creation of a large native and mixed-race underclass. Here, economic prosperity is borne by individuals who are alienated from the fruits of their labor, and as a result, “99.8 percent of the people here are psychosomatics . . . running from the disorders of temperate wastelands” (Subramani 1988, 26). Like immortalized lotus-eaters, the characters of Subramani’s work succumb to lethargy, as social sedimentation and the oppressive nature of racial identity cause many to accept or even embrace melancholia. But through individualized visions of despair, colonialism’s representation as purely a white/native binary is disrupted and replaced by a mongrelized vision of the Fijian “oppressed.”

Three particular stories reflect the power struggles of Fiji, and at first glance they may appear to simply reinforce the abysmal state of the colonized. First, in “Sautu,” the indentured Indian laborer Dhanpat loses contact with his son, who steals away to Australia to look for a better life but yields to “levity with women and money, and the frequent bouts of depression” (6). This tragedy, compounded by the Indians’ never-ending poverty, precipitates Dhanpat’s madness; his impotence is made complete when a native chief seizes the old man’s land as he is taken away for “observation” (8–9). In “No Man’s Land,” the misanthropic Tongan-Fijian Mosese burns with anger over the transformation of his village into “squalid colonies, huddled and overcrowded, receiving the city’s dispossessed” (30). Simultaneously, the mixed-race Mosese feels the sting of “incongruous and obscene” racial slogans used in a demonstration against foreigners, demonized and blamed for Fiji’s demise (36). In response, “Something inside him snapped like an expanded cord”; however, the moment passes, and Mosese disappears into the crowd (37). Insight into Fiji’s racial trou-

bles further emerges in the story, "Dear Primitive." This narrative centers on the character of Elaine, a local white woman contending with the prevalent belief that all whites are rich and do not choose to live permanently in Fiji. Aggravating her social position is her relationship with Ronnie, a wealthy foreign white tourist who refers to her as "my dear primitive." Surrounded by racist views, Elaine falls asleep, dreams of the sounds of the ocean closing in on her, and feels "she was drowned" (54).

Despite the fact that "colonial domination is achieved through a process of disavowal that denies the chaos of its intervention" (Bhabha 1994c, 111), Subramani's depiction of Fiji reveals a rupture of colonialism by its own inherently hybrid state. Homi Bhabha has further clarified this particular aspect within the colonial situation:

The exercise of colonialist authority, however, requires the production of differentiations, individuations, identity effects through which discriminatory practices can map out subject populations that are tarred with the visible and transparent mark of power. . . . Colonial authority requires modes of discrimination (cultural, racial, administrative . . . [these ellipses in original]) that disallow a stable unitary assumption of collectivity. . . .

The discriminatory effects of the discourse of . . . colonialism, for instance, do not simply or singly refer to a "person," or a dialectical power struggle between self and Other, or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien cultures. Produced through the strategy of disavowal, the *reference* of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different*—a mutation, a hybrid. (1994c, 111; italics in original)

In Fiji, western capitalism sells to everyone the fantasy of an earthly paradise of utter prosperity and the dream of being *other* than poor and disenfranchised. Oftentimes, that fantasy can only be maintained by a larger and collective "preoccupation with ethnic, tribal, or cultural specifics, where ethnicity has been perceived as the primary motivating force in inter-group relations" (Lecke 1992, 152). However, the disordered and feverish pursuit of a better life is enacted through the individualized desire to be anything but a social failure at being Indian, Fijian, mixed Polynesian, or white—a plurality that challenges the general narrative in which the figure of the "colonized" is limited to *one* color or heritage. Power is simultaneously fractured into a number of variables, such as the tensions between Indo-Fijians and Fijians, conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, the perpetuation of sharecropping and other subsistence lifestyles by greedy landlords, and the over-romanticization of women. By showing the

widespread pan-ethnic problems of Fiji, Subramani's stories suggest how the constant negotiation of both alterity and superiority can achieve resistance and mobility on the narrative level.

To a large extent, the writings of Hall, Wendt, and Subramani expose the trappings of collective control; however, standard therapy for such maladies also faces scrutiny as another method of articulating the "visible and transparent mark of power" (Bhabha 1994c, 111). Despite exhibiting what appear to be native sympathies, Mannoni's work implies that colonialism is the only stable force available to Africans, since madness is symptomatic of the "dependency complex," a theory that portrays the natives' desire for independence as the precursor for a psychological crisis erupting in guilt, insecurity, and an irrational fear of the supernatural (1990, 134, 136–137). For this reason, Frantz Fanon has postulated that the "cure," like the diagnosis, can also serve as political pacification. Because treatments for psychologically induced impotence, homicidal impulses, depression, sadism, delirium, suicidal conduct, phobias, neuroses, and other behavioral disturbances coincide with the suppression of national liberation, Fanon has argued that curing such deviancy effectively destroys the roots of discontent and the "criminality" that encourages the desire for political insurrection (1963, 303).

Again, colonialism's desired mastery is but a fantasy; even the medicinal science of political pacification cannot contain the disorder embodied by real hybrids, as suggested by Alistair Te Ariki Campbell's *The Frigate Bird* (1989), which follows an unnamed biracial individual's madness and unsuccessful search for a cure. This novel opens in an Auckland motel with the narrator preparing for a voyage to his birthplace and simultaneously confronting his panic: "I had the heebie-jeebies. I was going nuts again. I was certainly not in the right frame of mind to fly to Rarotonga and from there take a boat to Penrhyn, my mother's homeland. Only yesterday my sister had asked me why I was going. Good question, I thought, but aloud I told her I had promised my editor a story about our childhood in the Islands" (Campbell 1989, 1–2). In this passage, the narrator's unconscious desire to return to his motherland is by implication linked with his unsettled state, though he does not know why he has this desire. He cannot remember his past; he has very little memory of his mother's Cook Island family, from whom he was taken by his father's white New Zealand relatives on the death of both parents. Bereft of history, he can do little more than take exorbitant amounts of antidepressants and endure a number of horrible demons—the Giant Toad, the Big Mouth, the Purple Lady, the Lord of the Flies, and the Short-legged Apollo.

Once the narrator returns to Auckland, he is forced to recall his past, and he begins to see that his racial and cultural amnesia is the root of his inner turmoil. In a frenzied state, the narrator mentally reviews a previous conversation he had with friends and wrestles with a wretched sense of transgression:

It was perfectly clear to me that the Short-legged Apollo had passed on to Wiri what I had told him in strictest confidence, and they'd had a good laugh about it. It was an appalling thing to do—exposing my ancestors to ridicule—and he was punished for it. Far fetched? I don't think so. How else can I explain the alarming white figure that had risen in front of him outside the old family home, causing him to crash into the flame-tree?

That's all very well, I thought, as I swallowed a couple of pills, but why was *I* being punished? I can tell you I sweated in my room while I wrestled with this question. There is only one unpardonable sin, and that is to reject one's ancestors, and I was certain I hadn't done that. Then I remembered my sister telling me about the time when I was ashamed of my mother because of her colour, and I felt my mind shrinking to the size of a walnut. (38; italics in original)

Besides what he considers an irrational fear of vengeful “white” ghosts, the narrator suffers from guilt linked to his belief that he is being punished for things not voluntarily or consciously done. His unwilling denial of self and of personal choice is his curse, the “albatross” he bears. The far-traveling frigate bird, or *iwa*, a cousin of the albatross, reinforces this symbolism. One such bird slams into the glass window of the narrator's hotel room. Like this battered creature, the narrator suffers by running into invisible barriers, barriers that make his guilt complete by dividing him from his heritage, his people, his people's culture (which includes stories regarding the mythical significance of the *iwa*), and his sanity (39–40).

Yet, amnesia has its baser rewards. In fact, oblivion has helped the narrator to live a very comfortable life as a “white” man and to avoid the negative opinions that New Zealanders and elite Cook Islanders have of “his” people of Penrhyn, the “Saku.” The lure of the narrator's supposed racial identity attracts the attentions of a schoolgirl, whose intentions to “marry a *papa'a*, a European, as soon as possible and get away from Rarotonga” is related to him by the cleaning woman, who replies that Cook Islander boys are worthless because “They drink too much. That's all they do. They have no money and no sense” (28). Such is the general belief in the capital city of Rarotonga, caught between the promise offered by the white world of New Zealand, as symbolized by the *papa'a*, and the social abyss, represented by the “backward” communities of the more remote, north-

ern Cook Islands. This attitude is clearly expressed by the schoolgirl, who is surprised by the narrator’s revelation of his real ethnicity:

“You didn’t tell me you were Saku.”

“You didn’t ask me.”

“You don’t look Saku. You look *papa’a*.”

“I can’t help that—I’m half *papa’a*.” (42)

The fact that the narrator is actually part “Saku” momentarily stuns the schoolgirl. Nonetheless, she later asks him to take her to New Zealand, because he can pass for a full-blooded European. This request affects the narrator, who finally realizes that his physical appearance means more to the world than his actual ancestry.

Nevertheless, the narrator clings to an unstated native heritage, and the separation from this perceived past results in such an acute grief that he lands in an insane asylum, where he obsessively ponders his loss. Surrounded by other marginal figures—such as the political dissident Minotaur, and the Devil (Sidewinder) who stirs up fights between the patients—the narrator obsessively rethinks the rejection of his native identity. Unfortunately, conversations with the hospital psychiatrist only encourage the further dismissal of the root of his madness: “He [the psychiatrist] was silent for a while, then he continued. ‘Look at it this way. You’d been shattered by the death of your parents, and you were terribly insecure and vulnerable. In white New Zealand, you wanted to be accepted as one of the crowd. What kid doesn’t? And, after all, you were only eight. So you denied the one thing that made you different—the colour that you derived from your mother. In the circumstances, was that so terrible?’” (62). Such counsel is compounded by the lay advice of the hospital orderly, who recommends that the narrator “sweep the lot under the carpet” (63). Clearly, western medicine in this case would inure the native to his socially perceived whiteness at the expense of a loss of a culture that was disrupted by western intrusion into the Pacific. Such solutions only emphasize the propriety of the native’s internalized self-hate, which the narrator recognizes as a “state of mind. You get trapped in it, sometimes permanently” (75).

Escaping from this psychological prison paradoxically lies in abandoning all attempts to find a cure; Campbell’s narrator must honestly embrace the horrific loss of the past. For this, he embarks on another journey, this time to an up-country farm to write a feature article on the “effect of the present economic constraints on a typical runholder” (111). There, the narrator seeks out a ruined homestead. His host recalls the tragic events

that led to the ruins, explaining how an avalanche killed the family. The host's words have a profound impact on the narrator, and he is soon overwhelmed: "Of the old house, nothing remained apart from a small pile of rocks, part of a wall, which was barely distinguishable from other piles lying about. As I fossicked in the rubble, I was overcome by a feeling of despair so intense that I sat down, held my head in my hands, and groaned aloud. I heard a warning shout, but I was powerless to move, or even to open my eyes. Little hands tugged at me, pushed me and pinched me, until I had the terrifying feeling it was my soul they were fighting over" (121). This passage is more than a paranormal experience; this moment parallels the colonial experience, the clash between colonizers and the colonized that made farms like this possible. Imperial "progress" in New Zealand required the displacement of Māori from fertile lands and resulted in the loss of life among both whites and natives during the wars fought over territory. The same program of national development led to New Zealand's incorporation of the Cook Islands, which now provide migrant Saku labor for New Zealand. In both instances, the consequences have included the imposition of a cultural/racial hierarchy and the decimation of culture, the surviving remnants of which are fragmented like the narrator's family. Thus, in fossicking through his memories, the narrator encounters survivor's guilt for having eluded past catastrophes to which other natives and nonnatives have succumbed.

But in facing the horrific past, the mourning process can begin. The denial of one's racial heritage and the culpability in the destruction of one's own family are great sins; however, by accepting the burden of survival, the narrator is finally able to accept his demons. As he finds his head clearing, the narrator spies Inchcliffe, the sole survivor of the avalanche, looking upon him with "calm and compassionate eyes"; Inchcliffe beckons his charge: "'Come,' he murmured. 'The boss wants to take you across the river'" (121, 122). This moment symbolizes the narrator's movement forward, out of the wasteland of conscious blindness into the land of the "living," even though the latter incorporates loss, grief, and accountability—which will manifest themselves in other forms, such as impotence and dementia, in Campbell's next two works in this trilogy.

Apart from a redefinition of insanity and its remedy, Campbell's narrator's plight asks us to reconsider colonialism on another level—that colonialism is not, as in Mannoni's view, an unfailing scheme. Rather, as Bhabha has suggested, colonialism's essentializing, timeless, and static system of knowledge, which asserts "signifiers of stability," is actually

“continually under threat from diachronic forms of history and narrative, signs of instability” (1994b, 71). Colonialism may insist on a racial binary between colonizer and the colonized, but that discourse is always under pressure from an alternative strain of understanding that admits to miscegenation, to the inadequate and unfulfilling nature of a purely white social status, and to the presence of native sympathies. Campbell’s beleaguered narrator embodies this unspoken narrative, and his madness enunciates a juncture that questions the scientific rationale behind an acceptable identity, the soundness of a nation, and a complete understanding of history.

MADWOMAN IN THE PACIFIC: SIA FIGIEL’S EXPLORATION OF GENDERED MADNESS

Colonialism’s inherent instability is exploited by another writer, Sia Figiel, whose 1999 novel *Where We Once Belonged* revises more static depictions of the native from a female’s perspective. Figiel’s text features a character named Siniva, a Samoan woman whom “all the men in Malaefou loved . . . or rather, were ‘in lust’ with” (190). Initially, Siniva embraces feminist success in the western world, but she later rejects such illusions. Despite her New Zealand scholarship and her BA and MA degrees in history, Siniva returns to Sāmoa as a “hippie,” grows fat, and walks around Apia bare-breasted, crying out to passing tourists, “Go back to where you came from, you fucking ghosts! Gauguin is dead! There is no paradise!” (192). For this, she is beaten by the men of her family and called the “village fool” (199). Her death at the end of the novel barely attracts the attention of the community; she is only the madwoman the village wants to gossip about if not ignore.

However, through another character, Alofa, we are able to read Siniva in a different light. To Alofa, Siniva is more than a simple lunatic who talks to cats, refuses to shower, and seemingly rejects all men. Within Alofa’s dream, Siniva celebrates her liberation from blindness:

She was anointed by a bird who flew out of the Lightness and took her in his beak. The bird carried her body to the tears of Apaula. There it told Siniva that she was wasting herself, and that she should live as a memory of those who lived in the Lightness.

Siniva listened and listened, and agreed with the bird. And the bird laid an egg in a nest nearby and ordered Siniva to eat the egg.

“Eat the shell, too, especially,” said the bird.

Siniva tasted mythologies in the shell of the egg. She drank legends, too, in

the yolk of the egg . . . licking fagogo [myth] . . . tasting the adventures of Sina and Tigilau . . . tasting eels, turtles, owls, sharks, and other war gods worshipped in the Light . . . worshipped by all of Samoa.

"You are free," said the bird to Siniva. "You have remembered, again. Return to Malaefou and live among children. Tell them about us, Siniva. Tell them about our Lightness. Tell them that we are still there, that we live on. Tell them, Siniva. Tell them." (192–193; ellipses in original)

Siniva's situation is unconventionally interpreted by Alofa as an alternative to the inescapable social alienation and self-destruction seen among other Samoans. For Alofa, Siniva symbolizes a way out of the more oppressive conditions of her village, where a white man may live out his "Gauguin complex" with a little girl and where a Samoan man might use "his belt to speak" to a daughter who has witnessed his transgressions. As a kind of *tāupou* (ceremonial village maiden), Siniva harkens back to the divine myth of Sina, the woman who rejects the phallic eel, and, by implication, the patriarchal order (Mageo 2001, 65).

This is why Siniva's realm is the mythological world, not the everyday Sāmoa to which most characters of Figiel's book are confined. Her madness is her ability to reach into an alternative reality through which she imparts lessons to a young and still impressionable Alofa:

"This is wisdom. They belonged to a talking chief. When a talking chief dies, he passes these on to his sons and daughters. He hands on his wisdom through the strength of the to'oto'o [talking chief's staff] and the fue [chief's fly-whisk]. These were given to my father by my grandfather. My grandfather's father got it through his grandfather. . . .

"That's why we live in the light, Alofa. Yes, we live in the light. We are spared of this darkness through the wisdom of the to'oto'o, through the hair of the fue. Through the fue hair we breath [*sic*] genealogies, poetry . . . poetry in the scent of flowers and the moon . . . poetry in the flow of blood from the heads of enemies, from the mouths of enemies. Guarding lightness, we do . . . tulafale [talking chiefs] do. Giving birth, and birth to the light of before . . . before this darkness fell . . . before this darkness . . . before this . . . before . . ." (Figiel 1999, 202–203; ellipses in this paragraph in original)

In this encounter, Siniva bestows a form of wisdom that is linked to a history not found in conventional history books. Instead, the *fue* and the *to'oto'o* represent the power of the noble and traditional past, of the time before native men fell into the trap of western hyper-masculinity and the people became blinded by a more mundane reality of "too many Bibles.

Blinded by too many cathedrals . . . too many cars . . . too many faleapa [modernized houses] . . . six million dollar men . . . too much bullshit" (237; ellipses in original). So even as Siniva dies by suicide, her act symbolizes a chance to "re-evaluate, re-define, [and] re-member" (237). And for that reason, Siniva represents more than a paralyzing understanding of colonialism—she is "the bitch who's gonna come back to haunt us" (239). For Alofa, Siniva is an expression of a larger discontent that always haunts the capitalistic, racist, *and* misogynistic logic of colonialism.

CONCLUSION: MADNESS . . . AND BEYOND?

The insight provided by these writers of the Pacific should not be read as a simplistic correlation between colonialism and madness, for as Megan Vaughan has cautioned, "We do not have to pathologise our historical subjects to allow for the possibility that sometimes the price paid for survival and creativity may have been very high indeed" (1993, 54). Likewise, Albert Memmi's psychoanalysis of colonized identities warns that even his field of criticism "must not, under the pretext of having discovered the source or one of the main sources of human conduct, pre-empt all experience, all feeling, all suffering, all the byways of human behavior" and restrict colonialism's injustice to a simplified, universalized, even exoticized frame of mind (1991, xiii).

Nonetheless, the symbolic significance of a handful of characters can "bring to light the absolute iniquity of colonization; and, at the same time, to unveil the fundamental instability of it and predict its demise" (Memmi 1991, xvii). Such a move requires the recognition of the larger political realm, where the individual is faced with collective power and authority. Therefore, instead of overlooking individuals like Crichton, Tagata, Dhanpat, or Siniva as nameless lunatics, we must question why society has declared their acts censurable, or even sinful. Collectively, they represent a broad stream of racial, ethnic, and class experiences that accentuate the extent of postcontact, and even (post)colonial dissatisfaction. After all, these are the individuals who refuse to play gracious Islander hosts. They may go so far as to exercise violence against the fauna of the idyllic tropical landscape, or they may hurl insults at the tourists who come to see the best the Islands have to offer. They may not do their best to happily endure the oppressive nature of their lives, to go on suffering as unskilled labor or willing participants in someone else's romantic holiday. They may even cling to childhood memories of cultural alienation and dismiss society's

attempts to make them forget and forgive all. Such insubordination clearly constitutes a rejection of colonialism's illusion, that all can be well for the Calibans and the Prosperos of the Pacific.

In fact, the stories addressed in this paper reveal how proper categorical identities are a falsehood—or, as Fanon suggested, that despite the categories, there is no such thing as a quintessential “Negro” or a “white man” (1967, 231). The simple positing of absolutely distinct arenas of racial conduct denies individuals freedom of movement—a situation best expressed by the troubles of Crichton and Tagata. The presence and contradictory manners of individuals like Mosese, Dhanpat, Elaine, and Campbell's unnamed narrator further testify to the slippery nature of identity itself. Crichton may be a fallen white patriarch in the eyes of the “empowered” American, but the latter, too, will one day succumb to the same fate as his own “evolutionary” understanding of time suggests. Pepesa's wish to construct his friend Tagata's suicide as poetic resistance is compromised by Pepesa's own use of the colonizer's tongue as well as his desire to be the “second Robert Louis Stevenson” (Wendt 1974b, 105). Even Figiel's nativist Siniva is paradoxical; she harbors westernized (un-Samoan) ideas about private landownership, as she is the only person to have a fence around her property (1999, 201). The ambivalence of such characterizations demonstrates that individual identity involves more than the identification of a racially superior or subordinate “other.” In other words, identity “only emerges *in-between* disavowal and designation” (Bhabha 1994a, 50; italics in original). Indeed, no perfect picture of Prospero or Caliban can ever be made, and perhaps for this very reason, the stories of the Pacific include whispers of the demise of colonialism's absolute power, as they deconstruct colonial paradigms by “unsettling” what Bhabha called “simplistic polarities and binarisms in . . . the exercise of power” (1994a, 53).

While rewriting madness may be the key to dismantling the powerful colonial binary between insanity and reason, it would be wise to remember Foucault's desire to understand madness not as an alternative to logic or reason, but as a methodology to review the definition of both. Such a reading strategy might borrow from Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard's theory concerning Samoan comedic performances as a “licence for privileged expression, through which social norms of decorum and propriety can be humorously violated”; going beyond what she calls the “quotidian cares and constraints of orthodox society” (1999, 200), literary (de)constructions of madness allow us a glimpse into a more plural understanding of

what a less rigid, less socially stratified, less entrenched community might look like. Thus, literary attempts to use this narrative ought to be viewed as multiple social perspectives, which, as Epeli Hau'ofa has argued, are *already* a part of Pacific Island communities:

One of the more positive aspects of our existence in Oceania is that truth is flexible and negotiable, despite attempts by some of us to impose political, religious, and other forms of absolutism. Versions of truth may be accepted for particular purposes and moments, only to be reversed when circumstances demand other versions; and we often accede to things just to stop being bombarded, and then go ahead and do what we want to do anyway. . . . Our freedom lies in part in the flexibility in all kinds of discourse on the nature of our societies and on the directions of our development. There are no final truths or falsehoods, only interpretations, temporary consensus, and even impositions, for particular purposes. (2000, 454)

The temporality Hau'ofa has identified offers us a positivist reading of the paradoxes embodied by characters like Crichton and Siniva. For while no vision can be totally devoid of colonialism's presence, the maladies of these characters prove to us that if the underlying premise of imperialism was absolutely just and rational, we would not be called mad for saying otherwise.

* * *

MANY THANKS AND WARM ALOHA to Craig Severance, Karla Hayashi, Vili Hereniko, and Jan Rensel for their tireless eyes and red pens on this manuscript. Special thanks to Joan Hori and Junko Nowaki—we scholars would get nowhere without the incredible expertise of our special collections librarians. A mahalo also goes out to Kalani Makekau-Whitaker and Geoffrey White for additional materials for this essay.

Notes

1 I am using the terms “Oriental” and “Orientals” to signify the position that Asia and the Middle East occupy in colonial discourse. This term, while disparaging and subject to deconstruction in this paper, reveals the polarity inscribed not only in the ideological construct of nations and regions, but in the very paradigms we use to understand racial, ethnic, and cultural differences.

2 For interesting analyses of the institutionalization of western mental health in the eras preceding formal annexation, see Garcia 1972 and Poai 2000.

3 A caesura is a break in the flow of sound in the middle of a line of verse; a

pause. In theoretical terms, such a pause harkens to a moment prior to a disjuncture or digression.

4 Madness and craziness is well documented in many Pacific oral traditions, as in Hawai'i, for example, in the plethora of *'ōlelo no'eau* (proverbs) on the subject and in the writings of early scholars like David Malo. But the focus of this literary analysis is the appropriation of insanity as a metaphor for the colonial experience. Beginning my analysis with Hall should not be construed as a deliberate dismissal of precontact indigenous material or as a fixation on contact as the "beginning" of Pacific consciousness. Nevertheless, contact remains a key moment in history, and it is this aspect of history I wish to explore in this essay.

5 For a more complete analysis of Manichean identity, see JanMohamed 1983.

6 Subramani has offered an interesting albeit different reading of the existential nature of Wendt's work. Recognizing Wendt's reference to Camus, Subramani argued, "For Wendt, absurdity has a precise meaning, the absurdity of education in New Zealand in order to prepare for life in Samoa, and then the absurdity of living like middle class papalagi in Samoa while talking endlessly of the faa-Samoa. There is a metaphysical dimension, also, in man's loss of sovereignty over his own existence: man's first misfortune is his mortality. But equally important is the absurdity of the mortal man's manipulation and domination of other men through colonialism and other forms of oppression" (1992, 122). Apart from Subramani's chapter "Wendt's Crippled Cosmos" in *South Pacific Literature: From Myth to Fabulation* (1992), Paul Sharrad's 1990 article "Imagining the Pacific" offers another interpretation of the heart of darkness in Wendt's *Leaves of the Banyan Tree*. For alternative paired readings of *Leaves* and *Pouliuli*, see Robinson 1993 and Hereniko 1994.

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Abstract

In Pacific literature, theorizing madness in fictional narratives encourages a reexamination of the notion of “deviancy” that supports the western colonial differentiation between the powerful and the disempowered. Fictional accounts of madness often reveal how such bipolar ideology is inadequate to address individual identity in Pacific Island societies, which include variegated expressions of ethnic or racial diversity, sexuality, and gender. Not surprisingly, many Pacific writers use “disturbed” characters to disrupt social conventions and challenge the tendency of the mainstream toward two-dimensional, black and white portrayals. In an attempt to understand the prevalent use of madness to deconstruct colonial polarity in Pacific literature, this paper traces the depiction of insanity in the works of James Norman Hall, Albert Wendt, Subramani, Alistair Te Ariki Campbell, and Sia Figiel, authors who move beyond simplistic notions of identity and rethink the Pacific on their own terms.

KEYWORDS: Pacific literature, colonialism, insanity